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SUBJECT: S/CT AMBASSADOR DANIEL BENJAMIN AND GOK OFFICIALS DISCUSS
SOMALIA, REGIONAL SECURITY AND BILATERAL COUNTERTERRORISM COOPERATION

REF: 09 NAIROBI 2203; 09 DJIBOUTI 1391; 10 ADDIS ABABA 0166

CLASSIFIED BY: Samuel A. Madsen, POL EARS; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

Summary

1. (C) During a one-day visit to Kenya Ambassador-at-Large for Counterterrorism Daniel Benjamin discussed threats from Somalia, Islamic extremism inside Kenya, border security and Kenya's efforts to aid the Somalia Transitional Federal Government (TFG). Amb Benjamin met with George Saitoti, Minister of Interior and Provincial Administration, and commanders of the Kenyan police and intelligence services, as well as Brigadier Phillip Kameru Director of Military Intelligence (DMI). All of the Kenyan officials emphasized the threat that Kenya faces from Somalia and from domestic radicalization, praised United States/Kenya counterterrorism cooperation, and requested additional resources to confront extremism and criminal activity. End Summary.

2. (SBU) Amb Benjamin met with George Saitoti, Minister of Interior and Provincial Administration, January 29. Saitoti was joined by Mathew Iteere, Commissioner of Police, Commandant K. Mbugua, Administration Police (AP), MG Michael Gichangi, Director General of the National Security Intelligence Service (NSIS), and Nicholas Kamwende, Chief of the Anti-Terrorism Police Unit (ATPU). The delegation met separately with Brigadier Phillip Kameru, Director for Military Intelligence (DMI). Accompanying Amb Benjamin to these meetings were Lee Brudvig, Nairobi Deputy Chief of Mission, Mark Thompson, S/CT Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism (Operations), COL Rich Clarke, Joint Special Operations Command, MAJ Craig Miller, Liaison to S/CT, and Samuel Madsen, East Africa Regional Strategic Initiative Coordinator. Matt Thompson, Defense Intelligence Agency Resident Analyst, also accompanied the group to the meeting with the DMI.

Somalia Concerns

3. (C) Minister Saitoti noted that Kenya has seen Somalia as a problem since 1991. The Government of Kenya (GOK) has tried to help Somalia from time-to-time since then and fully supports the TFG now. The activities of al-Shabaab inside Somalia are a major concern for the GOK, particularly given Al Shabaab's links to al-Qaida, foreign fighters and other radicals. An additional concern is the 5000 to 6000 Somali refugees crossing into Kenya

each month, adding to the more than 360,000 who are already there. The GOK is particularly worried that at least some of those entering Kenya are extremists rather than refugees.

14. (C) In a related note, Saitoti said the GOK views the recent case of the Jamaican extremist Abdullah al-Faisal, who entered Kenya illegally from Tanzania, as destabilizing public harmony. He claimed that radicals, including al-Shabaab, were behind violent demonstrations in protest of al-Faisal's arrest.

15. (C) Saitoti also noted that Somali piracy has hurt Kenya. He claimed proceeds from ransoms paid to Somali pirate syndicates are being used to purchase expensive commercial and residential properties in Kenya at inflated prices, thus affecting the Kenyan economy by distorting the real estate market. In addition, quantities of small arms and light weapons from Somalia are entering the black market in Kenya. Saitoti appealed for greater USG tactical and technical assistance for the Kenyan police, noting that the ATPU is limited in size and capabilities and "can't be everywhere."

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16. (C) Saitoti added that the GOK sees Somalia as a security problem not just for Kenya but for the entire region. He referred to the 1998 bombing of the U.S. Embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam and the 2002 attacks on the Israeli owned hotel and airliner in Mombasa as examples of the terrorist threat coming from Somalia. The presence of al-Qaida operatives and foreign fighters in Somalia are causing increased concern. Saitoti lamented that international peacekeepers left Somalia in the mid 1990s, thus losing the opportunity to "resolve the situation" years ago. He added that the instability in and threats from Somalia are likely to get worse if the problem is not resolved now. While the TFG is weak, Saitoti said he believes they could do better with more help. However, the international community has not adequately supported the TFG. Unless the TFG receives increased international support al-Shabaab is likely to defeat it eventually. Saitoti noted that the GOK has proposed ways to assist the TFG, most recently with the Jubaland Initiative (see reftels), which is intended to train and equip a force of Somalis to drive al-Shabaab fighters from areas near the Kenyan border (further discussed below).

Confronting Extremism Inside Kenya

17. (C) Turning to Kenya's own concerns regarding religious extremism, Saitoti stated that al-Shabaab's control over most of southern Somalia reinforces the perception of TFG weakness and allows al-Shabaab to spread its ideology freely. He noted that Kenyan youth are susceptible to al-Shabaab propaganda if that message is not countered. While most Kenyan Muslims and ethnic Somali Kenyans are loyal citizens and reject extremism, Saitoti declared there is still a need to show that extremist ideology is false and wrong, particularly to the youth.

18. (C) Saitoti noted that Kenya faces serious economic difficulties stemming from violence following the December 2007 presidential elections. Foreign investment and Kenya's vital tourism industry both suffered large declines following the unrest and recovery has been slow. The economic downturn has led to high unemployment among youth in all communities. He believes youth are easily misled by promises of opportunity from extremists. Saitoti claimed the GOK is implementing youth programs to create jobs. He did not offer details of specific programs but stated that these efforts need USG assistance, either directly or through NGOs. He

observed that there is a particular need for micro financing initiatives to empower youth and reduce the appeal of radical ideologies.

NSIS Director Alarmed over Civil Society

¶9. (C) Maj. Gen. Michael Gichangi, Director General of the National Security Intelligence Service (NSIS), noted that the GOK is concerned by the global rise of radicalization, and fears this could spread to Kenyans, particularly the growing youth population. He stated that over the last seven years Kenya has developed a much more open civil society. He expressed concern, however, that this greater openness can be exploited by radicals and U.S. efforts to support an open civil society can potentially "create space" for extremists.

¶10. (C) Gichangi said the financial aid provided by the United States and others to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) operating in Kenya needs to be carefully monitored and directed in order to prevent radicals from using these NGOs as covers for extremist activities. He encouraged the United States to target carefully its assistance to Kenyan civil society, suggesting that the USG "partner" with the GOK in directing aid to civil society in order to insure it does not go to radicals. He asked that the Embassy share information with the GOK regarding which NGOs are currently

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receiving assistance and specifically mentioned the Muslim Human Rights Forum as an NGO he believes to be affiliated with Islamic extremists. Saitoti endorsed MG Gichangi's remarks, noting that terrorist front organizations operate around the world and the United States and other donor nations must avoid empowering them.

Law Enforcement and Border Control

¶11. (C) Commissioner of Police Iteere noted that the border area is made up of an ethnic Somali culture divided by the border. He praised the aid provided through the U.S. Anti-Terrorism Assistance (ATA) program but said he needs more, particularly additional resources such as equipment and vehicles to empower the ATPU. He also said there is a need for increased resources for border security, noting that the crossing point where Jamaican extremist Faisal entered Kenya is not monitored around the clock and lacks computer based systems for tracking entries and exits. Iteere also pointed out that Kenya has supported the trial and imprisonment of Somali pirates but these efforts pose a burden on the GOK.

¶12. (C) Administration Police (AP) Commandant Mbugua seconded Iteere's appreciation for USG capacity-building assistance, particularly the recent donation of patrol boats and the efforts by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security/Customs and Border Protection to help train a new AP border patrol unit. He noted, however, that the AP's border agents still lack basic equipment, particularly vehicles and aircraft for border monitoring. Mbugua stated that the international community and USG need to appreciate that in confronting the problems of Somalia Kenya is dealing with an international issue. The GOK has done what it can with existing resources but requires more.

¶13. (C) Saitoti recommended that the United States and Kenya work together to develop a joint strategy to address Somalia issues. He concluded by stating that the GOK is committed to political and security reforms. The violence that followed the 2007 elections damaged Kenya's tradition of peace and acted as a wake-up call regarding the need for reform. He said the GOK is committed to the fundamental reforms now underway, including the new constitution that has been drafted and is now undergoing the review process.

The Threat from Somalia and al-Shabaab's Motivation

¶14. (C) Phillip Kameru, Director for Military Intelligence (DMI), characterized Somalia as Kenya's primary foreign threat and noted that the Kenyan military is working to improve security along the border. Kameru claimed that the medical school bombing in Mogadishu had reduced al-Shabaab's stature within Somalia, but top leaders remain firmly committed to their course. There has been some al-Shabaab recruitment inside Kenya, including at the Dadaab refugee camp, particularly for local Somali clan militias. Most of these recruits sign up with al-Shabaab for the pay as opposed to ideological reasons. Al-Shabaab senior leaders obtain much of their funds from the port of Kismayo. Al-Shabaab also skims money and supplies from humanitarian assistance and charges tolls for trucks carrying humanitarian aid and commercial cargo in areas under their control.

¶15. (C) Maritime infiltration of suspected extremists from Somalia has declined since mid-2009, largely due to increased patrolling by the Kenyan Navy and Maritime Police Unit. Some infiltrators still utilize existing smuggling routes. Many of these involve sailing far out to sea then running straight into Kenyan ports, versus the traditional infiltration routes through coastal areas.

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¶16. (C) Kameru claimed there are signs of increasing radicalization among rank-and-file al-Shabaab members, largely as a result of proselytizing by Whabbists. While many al-Shabaab fighters are still motivated by money, Kameru believes an increasing number are fighting for ideological reasons. Al-Shabaab is also working to indoctrinate the populace in areas under its control.

¶17. (C) Kameru added that the DMI sees significant numbers of Tanzanians, Ugandans and Kenyans among the foreigners fighting alongside al-Shabaab. Many are Muslim converts who have been radicalized. He also claimed to have seen evidence of non-Muslim Nigerians working with al-Shabaab, although possibly not as fighters. He said al-Shabaab members receive basic military training from Somali al-Shabaab members and foreigners, but specialized and advanced training is largely provided by the foreign fighters.

The Jubaland Initiative

¶18. (C) Kameru extensively discussed the Kenyan government's Jubaland Initiative, under which the Kenyan military is training and equipping a force of Somalis whose mission will be to enter Somalia and drive al-Shabaab militias away from the areas along the

Kenyan border. He began by stating that al-Shabaab views the Kenyan government as a threat that it needs to deal with. He added that the DMI expects al-Shabaab to begin cross border incursions into Kenya and he claimed to have received reports indicating al-Shabaab has plans to use improvised explosive devices and landmines against security personnel and civilian traffic inside Kenya. Kameru said there are other reports of al-Shabaab stockpiling weapons in border regions.

¶19. (C) Kameru said Kenya wants to develop a buffer zone inside Somalia to prevent al-Shabaab infiltration and incursions. He claimed that the TFG agrees with the initiative because it wants to reduce al-Shabaab pressure from the Juba region. In addition, many in the region reject al-Shabaab's ideology and would like to see them driven out.

¶20. (C) Kameru noted that the initiative cannot succeed as just a military operation. A viable political process must be established as follow-on to the military operations, he said. The force will need the support of the local population in order to prevent a prolonged guerrilla campaign. He also stated that, while Kenyan military trainers are training the force in conventional military tactics and operations, veteran Somali and TFG personnel are also providing instruction in unconventional military tactics employed by al-Shabaab.

¶21. (C) Kameru stated that the original Jubaland Initiative called for 3000 trained fighters but only 2000 are now available. These include 600 police and trained civil administrators to provide security and government services following the operation. He added that the DMI estimates al-Shabaab to have about 1000 to 1500 fighters in the Juba area and approximately 6000 nationwide. According to Kameru, the GOK is also concerned about reports indicating that al-Shabaab is activating old training camps in the Juba region. If true this would allow al-Shabaab to mobilize and train large numbers of additional fighters.

¶22. (C) Saitoti noted that he was aware of USG skepticism regarding the Jubaland Initiative. He insisted, however, that Kenya intends to press forward. He defended the program by pointing out that Kenya shares a long, poorly defined border with Somalia and sees a trend toward increasing numbers of Somali

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refugees crossing into Kenya. The GOK is seriously concerned by the possibility that Somali militants may be crossing the border hidden among the refugees. He noted that the GOK is willing to consider alternative USG proposals to the Jubaland Initiative.

¶23. (C) COMMENT: Amb Benjamin's interlocutors universally emphasized that they view al-Shabaab and Somalia as their primary external security threat and that external threat is interconnected with the growing menace posed by domestic Islamic extremism. Post shares these concerns and views Kenya as a vital partner in regional counterterrorism efforts. However, post believes efforts intended to counter extremism in Kenya must take place within a framework of fundamental political, judicial and security sector reform.

¶24. (U) Amb Benjamin did not clear this cable.
RANNEBERGER